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# FLYING COLUMN

IN ARAB-STYLE HEAD-DRESS THEY ROAMED THE LIBYAN WASTES WITH TRIGGER-FINGERS AT THE READY. THEIR TASK WAS RECONNAISSANCE, DEEP IN THE ENEMY'S OWN "BACKYARD".



THEY OPERATED IN MOBILE PATROLS, PROUDLY SPORTING THE INITIALS "L. R. D. G." ON THEIR SHOULDERS. TO THE MEN OF THE LONG-RANGE DESERT GROUP, THIS STORY IS DEDICATED.



# Chapter 1 *Desert Skirmish*

ONE MOONLIT NIGHT LATE IN 1941, A PATROL COMMANDED BY CAPTAIN MIKE FARRELL BOWLED THROUGH THE DEBRIS OF A BRITISH AIR-STRIKE.



PINT-SIZED LANCE CORPORAL RILEY WAS RIGHT. HERE WAS A CLASSIC INSTANCE OF THE VITAL ROLE PLAYED BY THE L.R.D.G. BUT SUDDENLY...





RILEY OBEYED SMARTLY. MIKE FARRELL LEAPED FROM THE CAB AND WAVED DOWN THE REST OF THE PATROL. HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, LIEUTENANT CARRON, SANG OUT QUESTIONINGLY...





## Flying Column

MIKE FARRELL WAS NOT MISTAKEN. THE NAZIS WERE BY NO MEANS IN A STATE OF ALERTNESS. AFTER ALL, THE BATTLE-FRONT WAS TWO HUNDRED MILES TO THE EAST.



JOHNNIE CARRON INDULGED IN SPECULATION.

I SUPPOSE THEY'RE BOUND FOR A PANZER SUPPLY DEPOT OR A FORWARD AIRFIELD.

WHEREVER THEY'RE BOUND FOR, THEY'RE NOT GOING TO GET THERE!



AS THEY RETRACED THEIR STEPS TO THEIR TRUCKS, JOHNNIE CARRON FROWNED...

I THOUGHT WE WERE TO GATHER INFORMATION AND NOT ON ANY ACCOUNT TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY UNLESS COMPELLED TO DO SO...

YOU AIN'T BEEN WITH US LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT CAPTAIN FARRELL MAKES HIS OWN RULES, SIR. MAYBE THAT'S WHY EVERY MAN IN THIS PATROL WOULD FOLLOW HIM THROUGH HELL AND BEYOND.





GRIM-FACED, EAGER-EYED, THE GUNNERS TOOK UP ACTION STATIONS. A WORD FROM MIKE, AND RILEY SET THE PACE...



GET READY TO GIVE THAT FIRST BOWSER ALL YOU'VE GOT, BOYO / SO HELP ME, I'LL SEE YOU'RE TRANSFERRED BACK TO THE FOOTSLOGGING INFANTRY IF SHE DOESN'T END UP A 'FLAMER'

THE MUNCHING GERMANS LOOKED UP CASUALLY ENOUGH AS THEY HEARD THE TRUCKS SPEEDING TOWARDS THEM. NEXT MOMENT...



HIMMEL! A SURPRISE ATTACK!



## Flying Column

CRIMSON TRACER LASHED FROM THE TWIN LEWIS GUNS MOUNTED BEHIND THE CAB OF THE LEADING BRITISH TRUCK. A BOWSER EXPLODED IN A BLINDING SHEET OF FLAME.



THE TRUCKS OF THE L.R.D.G. SWEEP PAST THE GERMAN VEHICLES, RAKING THEM WITH FIRE-BARBED LEAD...



TWO PETROL-CARRIERS SURVIVED THE INITIAL ONSLAUGHT... LIKEWISE A NUMBER OF THE NAZIS, INCLUDING A FELDWEBEL WITH A VOICE LIKE A TRUMPET-BLARE...



SCHMEISSER AND MAUSER BULLETS FLOGGED AT THE RETURNING BRITISH TRUCKS, BUT FAILED TO CHECK THEM.





MIKE FISHED OUT A BAKELITE GRENADE. IT DID NOT HAVE THE LETHAL CAPACITY OF A MILLS 36. NEVERTHELESS, IT COULD BE EFFECTIVE ENOUGH...



THE GRENADE HIT THE GROUND AND BURST ON IMPACT... AT THE GERMAN'S FEET...



THE REST OF THE NAZIS FLED. THE BRITISH PATROL STOOD OFF FROM THE LURID GLARE AND THE LEWIS GUNNERS USED THE REMAINING BOWSERS FOR TARGET PRACTICE....



IN ANOTHER MINUTE OR SO, THE RESULTS OF THE ATTACK WERE COMPLETELY TO MIKE'S SATISFACTION. HE SWUNG HIS PARTY EASTWARDS AGAIN...





BY FIRST LIGHT THEY WERE FAR INTO THE TRACKLESS OCEAN OF THE LIBYAN WILDERNESS. THEY HALTED AMID THICK SCRUB, AND TOOK COVER AFTER CAMOUFLAGING THEIR VEHICLES.



THEY STAYED PUT ALL THAT DAY, WITHOUT BEING DETECTED. AT NIGHT THEY MOVED ON AGAIN. SEVENTY-TWO HOURS LATER, THEY FINALLY SIGHTED AN OASIS. IT WAS THEIR BASE.



THE OASIS WAS KNOWN AS KUFARA. ARRIVED THERE, MIKE REPORTED TO HIS IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR...



A PRETTY SUCCESSFUL TOUR OF DUTY, SIR. NOTHING ON THE DEBIT SIDE EXCEPT A FEW BULLET HOLES IN THE TRUCKS. WE RAN SMACK INTO A COVEY OF AFRIKA KORPS MEN ON THE WAY BACK. COULDN'T AVOID 'EM...

COULDN'T AVOID THEM? I'VE HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE, MIKE! WHY DON'T YOU ADMIT YOU WERE SPOILING FOR A FIGHT?

THERE WAS A MILD TOUCH OF REPRIMAND IN MAJOR LAWRENCE'S VOICE. MIKE ONLY GRINNED...



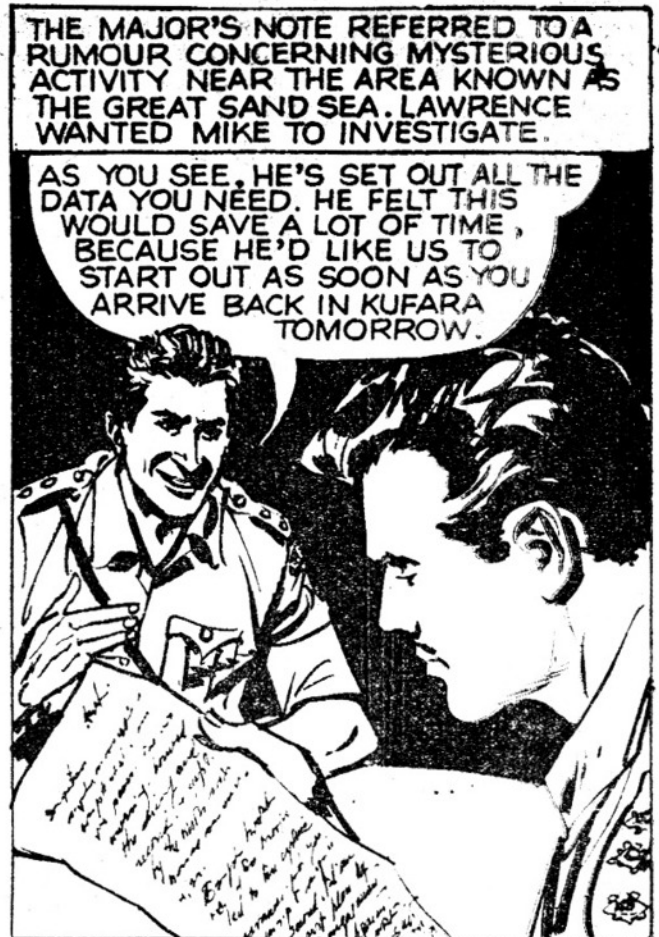
ADMIT I FLOUTED STANDING-ORDERS? NOT ME! IF I OWNED UP TO IT, I BELIEVE YOU'D CANCEL THE SEVEN DAYS' LEAVE THAT ARE DUE TO ME.

I MIGHT AT THAT... NO, ON SECOND THOUGHTS I WOULDN'T. I'LL BE GLAD TO SHED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HAVING YOU ON MY STRENGTH FOR THE NEXT WEEK, YOU REBELLIOUS CUSS.



MIKE SPENT HIS FURLOUGH IN CAIRO, PUTTING UP AT ONE OF THE CITY'S HOTELS. IT WAS THERE HE RECEIVED AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR ON THE LAST NIGHT OF HIS STAY.





PRESENTLY YOUNG CARRON LEFT. MIKE HAD HIS MEAL, THEN WENT OFF TO A THEATRE, AND LATER TO A CABARET. IT WAS WELL AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN HE RETURNED TO HIS HOTEL...





HE STARTED FOR THE HOTEL ENTRANCE... AND HEARD A SCUFFLE OF FEET...



HE THREW UP ONE ARM AND BLOCKED A BLOW FROM A CLUB. BUT HIS ATTACKERS WERE TOO MANY, TOO RUTHLESS...



MIKE BUCKLED AT THE KNEES, AND WAS STRUCK AGAIN. A BLINDING LIGHT SEEMED TO EXPLODE BEFORE HIS EYES.



MIKE REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS TO FIND HIMSELF IN A CAIRO MILITARY HOSPITAL. MAJOR LAWRENCE WAS AT HIS BEDSIDE.



YOU'VE BEEN OUT COLD FOR SEVERAL HOURS, BUT I UNDERSTAND YOU SHOULD BE FIT FOR DUTY AGAIN PRETTY SOON. DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE MISSION I HAD IN MIND FOR YOU. I DETAILED YOUNG CARRON TO GO AHEAD WITH IT.

WAS THAT WISE AFTER ALL, JOHNNIE'S ONLY A 'GREEN KID'!





MIKE WAS REASSURED. YET WHEN HE SHOWED UP AT KUFARA IN DUE COURSE HE FOUND THE MAJOR A WORRIED MAN.



LAWRENCE SHOOK HIS HEAD MOODILY...

NOTHING DOING, MIKE! H.Q. INSIST THE RESERVE PATROL SHOULD HOLE-UP IN THE TRIGH-EL-ABD AREA AND FURNISH INFORMATION ON A BUILD-UP OF ENEMY TROOPS THERE.



A DISTURBING THOUGHT WAS NAGGING AT MIKE. WAS *HE* RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY HARM THAT HAD BEFALLEN CARRON AND HIS PARTY...?

WHY DIDN'T I DESTROY THE NOTE CARRON BROUGHT TO ME IN CAIRO? I STUCK IT IN MY WALLET AND IT MAY HAVE BEEN PASSED ON TO AN ENEMY AGENT BY THE THUGS WHO ROBBED ME.



HE FELT HE HAD TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO CARRON AND HIS MEN. YET HE KNEW HE COULD NOT PERSUADE THE MAJOR INTO FLOUTING AN ORDER FROM H.Q.

THE RESERVE PATROL MAY WIND UP IN THE TRIGH-EL-ABD AREA - BUT IT'S NOT GOING THERE DIRECT!





## Chapter 2. *Mystery Massacre*

THE RESERVE PATROL WAS NORMALLY COMMANDED BY AN EXPERIENCED SUBALTERN, BUT HE WAS ON THE SICK-LIST. MIKE SOUGHT OUT A SERGEANT WHO WAS STANDING-IN FOR HIM...



SERGEANT MEREDITH HAD BEEN A UNIVERSITY STUDENT IN CIVVY STREET. HIS MEN RECKONED HIM A BOOKWORM AND CALLED HIM "PROFESSOR." BUT HE WAS AN EFFICIENT SOLDIER...



PRETTY SOON, MIKE WAS ALSO READY. HE HAD A FINAL WORD WITH MEREDITH...

I'LL TRAVEL IN THE WIRELESS TRUCK, SERGEANT - AND ALONE. I'LL DO MY OWN DRIVING. UNDERSTOOD?

THAT'S A BIT UNUSUAL, SIR, ISN'T IT?



MIKE MADE IT CLEAR HE WAS IN NO FRAME OF MIND FOR ARGUMENT. HE CLIMBED INTO THE WIRELESS TRUCK AND MOVED UP TO THE FRONT OF THE CONVOY.



THE PATROL THRUST WESTWARDS. THE FOLLOWING DAY, DURING A HALT FOR A "BREW-UP", MEREDITH APPROACHED MIKE...





THE WESTWARD JOURNEY WAS CONTINUED. IN ANOTHER 24 HOURS MIKE SIGHTED THE WADI ZALTAN — AND GAVE AN EXCLAMATION OF DISMAY...

ELEVEN CROSSES —  
ELEVEN GRAVES / CARRON  
HAD TEN MEN UNDER  
HIS COMMAND...



I GET IT, CAPTAIN FARRELL.  
YOU KNEW WHAT YOU WERE  
DOING, ALL RIGHT. YOU  
DISREGARDED ORDERS AND  
BROUGHT US AWAY OFF-COURSE  
TO SATISFY A MORBID CURIOSITY.  
AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT IT'S  
AMOUNTED TO...

AN EXPRESSION OF GRIEF HAD ETCHED ITSELF ON MIKE'S FACE, BUT AS MEREDITH'S WORDS SANK IN, HE TURNED ON THE SERGEANT FIERCELY...

LISTEN, THE MEN LYING IN THESE GRAVES MEANT A LOT TO ME / REGARDLESS OF RANK, I LOOKED ON THEM AS FRIENDS.

SIR, THE FACT REMAINS WE HAVE NO AUTHORITY FOR BEING HERE.

BUT MIKE IGNORED HIM, STARING ABOUT HIM WITH PERPLEXITY...

WAIT - THERE'S SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THIS. THERE'S NO SIGN OF THE FIGHT THAT FINISHED CARRON'S PATROL. I DON'T EVEN SEE ANY SPENT CARTRIDGES...



HE PAUSED AS THE DRONE OF AN AIRCRAFT ENGINE BECAME AUDIBLE. MEREDITH, CRISP- EFFICIENT, SHARP-EYED, IDENTIFIED THE PLANE...

AN ITALIAN! A MACCHI FIGHTER- BOMBER!





THERE WAS NO TIME FOR CONCEALMENT. THE SITUATION CALLED FOR OFFENSIVE DEFENCE...



THE PILOT OF THE MACCHI HAD SPOTTED THE TRUCKS — AND NOSED DOWN FOR CLOSER SCRUTINY...



THE ITALIAN FLIER AND THE BRITISH PATROL TRADED LEAD, IN SAVAGE SALUTATION...



THE MACCHI CARRIED A COUPLE OF 220-POUND BOMBS. ITS PILOT TRIGGERED ONE OF THEM AS HE THUNDERED OVERHEAD...





## Flying Column

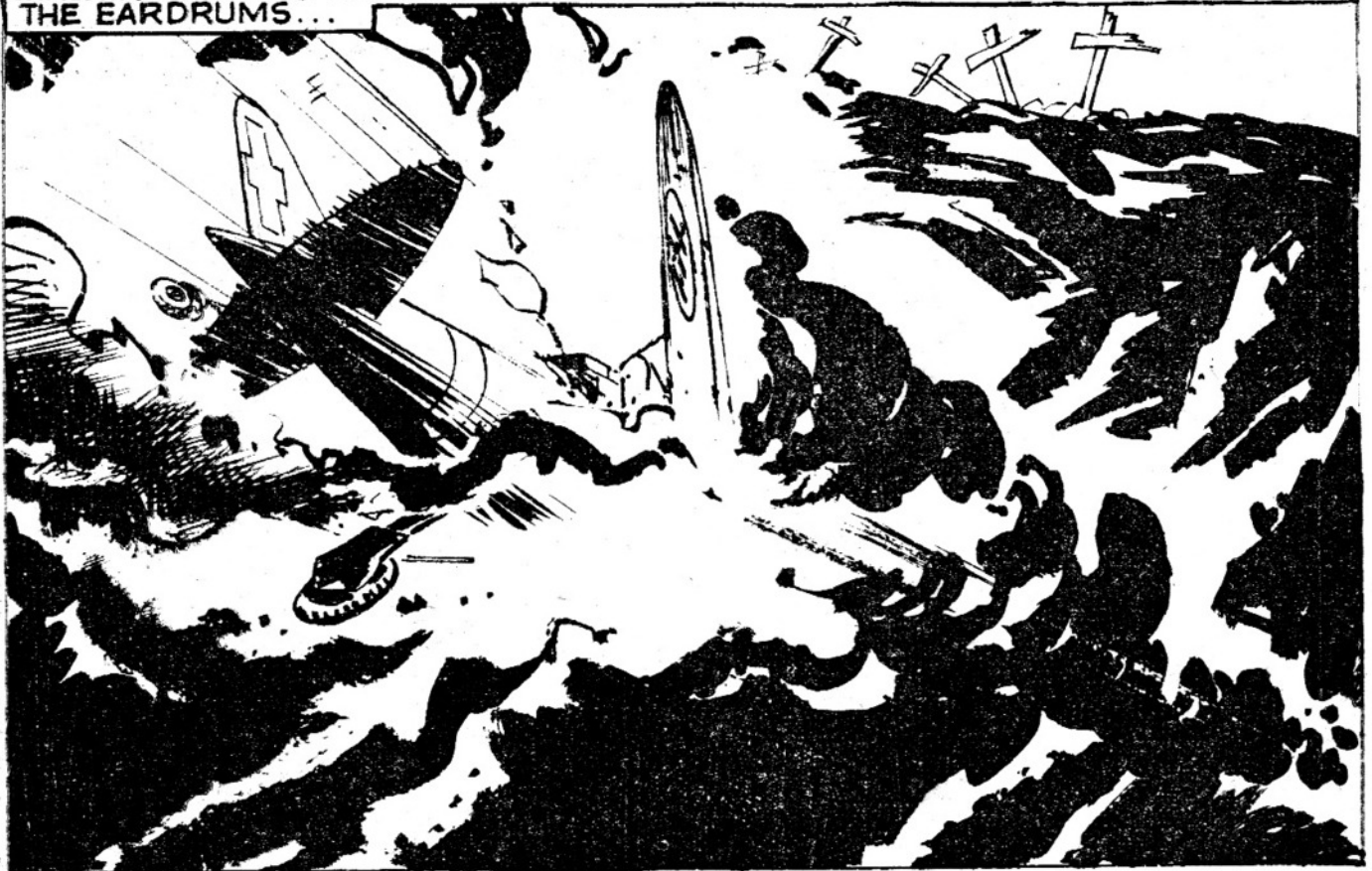
THE SHOCK-WAVE OF THE EXPLOSION SWEEPED MIKE OFF HIS FEET AND CASCADED SAND OVER HIM. MEREDITH RAN TO HIM...



THE MACCHI'S PILOT CIRCLED FOR ANOTHER PASS AT THE PATROL AND FLEW INTO A FEROCIOUS CURTAIN OF BULLETS. HIS PLANE SEEMED TO FALTER...



THE NOSE OF THE AIRCRAFT DIPPED SHARPLY AND IT HIT THE WADI'S SLOPE. THE MACHINE AND ITS REMAINING BOMB BLEW UP WITH A ROAR THAT BATTERED THE EARDRUMS...



THE SMOKE OF THE EXPLOSION CLEARED, TO REVEAL A MINIATURE LANDSLIDE THAT HAD DISLODGED THE ROW OF WOODEN CROSSES...





ENTRENCHING TOOLS AND SHOVELS VERIFIED MIKE'S SUSPICION. CARRON AND THE PATROL WERE NOT BURIED THERE...



SERGEANT MEREDITH EXPRESSED DISAPPROVAL...

SIR, I WISH TO REGISTER A PROTEST. OUR MISSION IS A RECONNAISSANCE OF THE TRIGH-EL-ABD!

PROTEST DULY NOTED. SUBJECT CLOSED!



TYRE-TRACKS LED WEST FROM THE WADI ZALTAN. MIKE KEPT TO THEM UNTIL THEY PETERED OUT ON BARE ROCK.

CARRON'S OBJECTIVE WAS TO HAVE BEEN THE SOUTH-WESTERN TIP OF THE GREAT SAND SEA. THAT'S WHERE I'LL MAKE FOR, TOO.



NEXT EVENING THEY WERE ONLY A FEW HOURS FROM THE AREA OF DESERT KNOWN AS THE GREAT SAND SEA. MIKE DECIDED ON AN ALL-NIGHT DRIVE, WHICH ENDED SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN...



HE SINGLED OUT ONE OF THE MEN...





## Flying Column

MIKE ARMED HIMSELF WITH A TOMMY GUN, AND HE AND WILSON SET OUT. THEY WORKED CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH A RANGE OF SCRUB...



THE FORT DATED FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF ITALIAN COLONISATION, WHEN THERE HAD BEEN ARAB UNREST. AT FIRST GLANCE IT SEEMED DESOLATE, BUT ITS LOOKS BELIED IT...





WILSON SWUNG ROUND. IT WAS THEN THAT A DIMINUTIVE FIGURE ROSE UP NEARBY.





MIKE STARED AT RILEY UNCOMPREHENDINGLY.

THERE AIN'T NO BRITISH GARRISON AT THAT FORT, SIR. MEN IN BRITISH UNIFORMS, YES — AND TALKIN' ENGLISH AS GOOD AS YOU AND ME. BUT THEY'RE GERMANS, SIR. HAND-PICKED NAZIS!



THE LANCE CORPORAL WENT ON TO DESCRIBE HOW CARRON'S PATROL HAD ENCOUNTERED A TRUCKLOAD OF THOSE BOGUS BRITISH SOLDIERS AT THE WADI ZALTAN...

THEY FOOLED US COMPLETELY — GOT THE DROP ON US — MADE US DIG FAKE GRAVES SO THAT ANYBODY LOOKING FOR US WOULDN'T BE LIKELY TO SEARCH FURTHER. THEN THEY FORCED US TO DRIVE TO THE FORT.



THEY STUCK US IN A CELL. WE MANAGED TO PRISE ONE BAR LOOSE FROM ITS WINDOW — BUT ONLY ONE BAR. BEIN' SO TICHY, I WAS ABLE TO SQUIRM THROUGH. MISTER CARRON SAID I WAS TO TRY AND GET HELP.

THE LITTLE N.C.O. WAS INTERRUPTED AT THAT POINT BY AN OUTCRY IN THE FORT, AN OUTCRY THAT SWIFTLY DEVELOPED INTO A TREMENDOUS HULLABALOO.



A TRUCK SURGED INTO FULL VIEW. CAPTURED IN SOME DESERT BATTLE, IT WAS GENUINELY BRITISH - AND THE MEN ABOARD IT SEEMED TO BE BRITISH, TOO...





MIKE'S GAZE WAS ON THAT TRUCK. HE DROPPED FLAT AND STARTED TO COME UP INTO THE AIM...



WILSON AND THE LITTLE LANCE JACK MADE OFF THROUGH THE SCRUB WHILE MIKE LINED UP HIS SIGHTS ON THE TRUCK, CAREFULLY, UNHURRIEDLY...



HIS FIRST SHOTS SHATTERED THE LORRY'S WINDSCREEN. IT SWERVED WILDLY, WITH A WOUNDED DRIVER FOLDED OVER THE STEERING-WHEEL...



THEN THE VEHICLE CAPSIZED. BEFORE THE DUST HAD SETTLED, MIKE WAS ON HIS FEET, RACING TOWARDS IT...

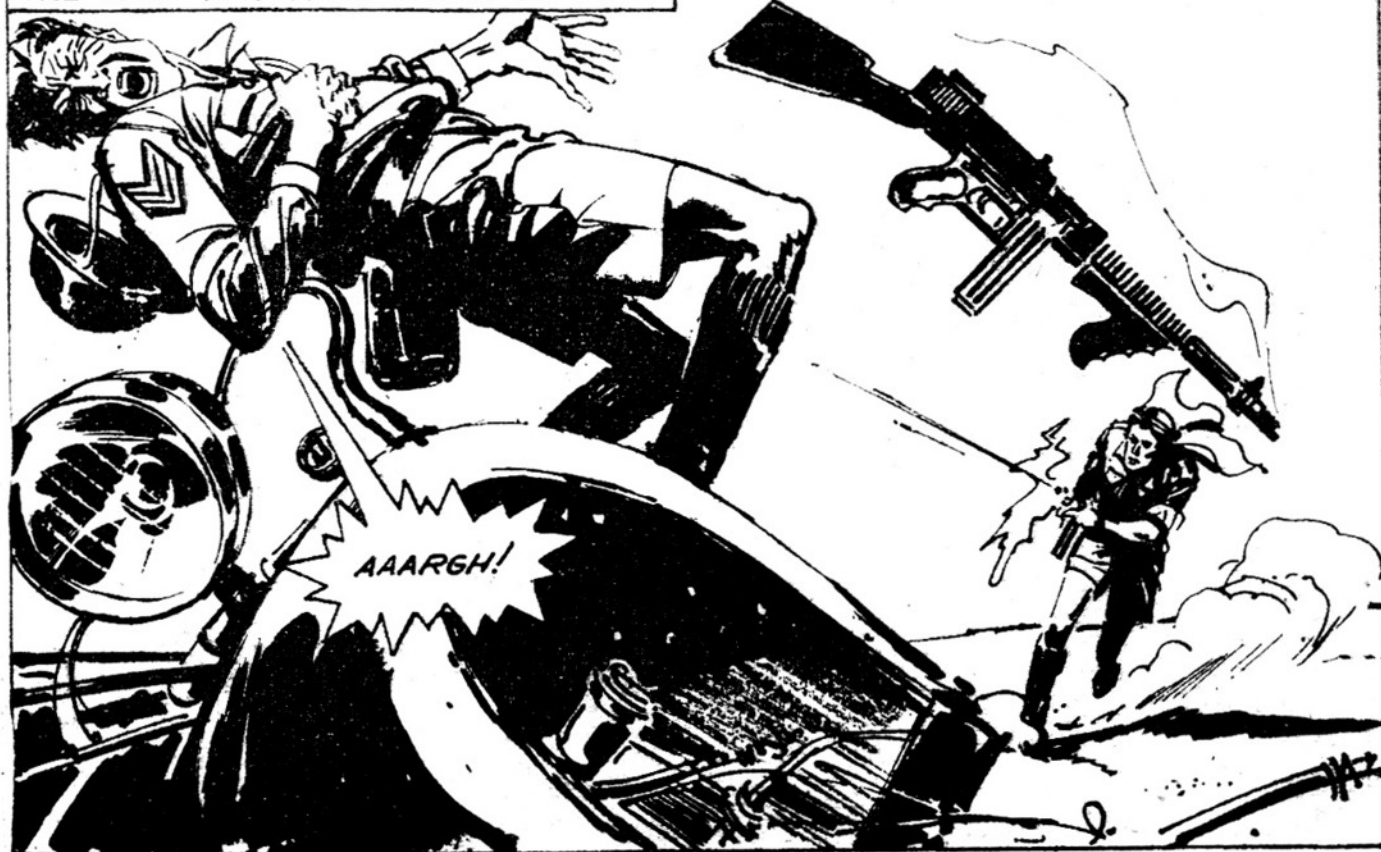




A CHARACTER WITH A SERGEANT'S CHEVRONS SCRAMBLED UP FROM THE CAB. HE FORGOT HIS ENGLISH IN A TORRENT OF GERMAN OATHS...



A WICKED SPRAY OF BULLETS SMOKED PAST MIKE'S HEAD AND HE ANSWERED THE NAZI WITH A HIP-LEVEL BURST...



THE MEN WHO HAD BEEN SPILLED FROM THE LORRY WERE PICKING THEMSELVES UP. A SHOT SLAPPED OUT AND MIKE FELT THE SPLIT-SECOND TUG OF IT AS IT RIPPED THROUGH HIS SLEEVE...



HE DROPPED THE RIFLEMAN WHO HAD SO NEARLY WINGED HIM. ANOTHER WENT DOWN BEFORE THE DEADLY HAIL FROM THE THOMPSON SUB-MACHINE GUN. THE REST STAMPEDED...





THE FUGITIVES DID NOT STOP RUNNING TILL THEY WERE BACK INSIDE THE FORT. AS FOR MIKE, HE HASTILY TRACKED EASTWARD AND REJOINED SERGEANT MEREDITH.



A FIERY GLINT KINDLED IN MIKE'S EYES.



## Chapter 3. *The Kill!*

MEREDITH SANG DUMB. BEFORE LONG, THE RESERVE PATROL WAS ON THE MOVE ONCE MORE. THE WIRELESS TRUCK WAS STILL TO THE FORE, BUT NOW RILEY WAS IN ITS DRIVING-SEAT...



THE LEWIS GUNS ON THE PATROL'S 30-HUNDREDWEIGHTS STARTED UP. THE FORT GATES WERE IMMEDIATELY CLOSED AND NAZIS IN BRITISH UNIFORM RACED TO BATTLE STATIONS.

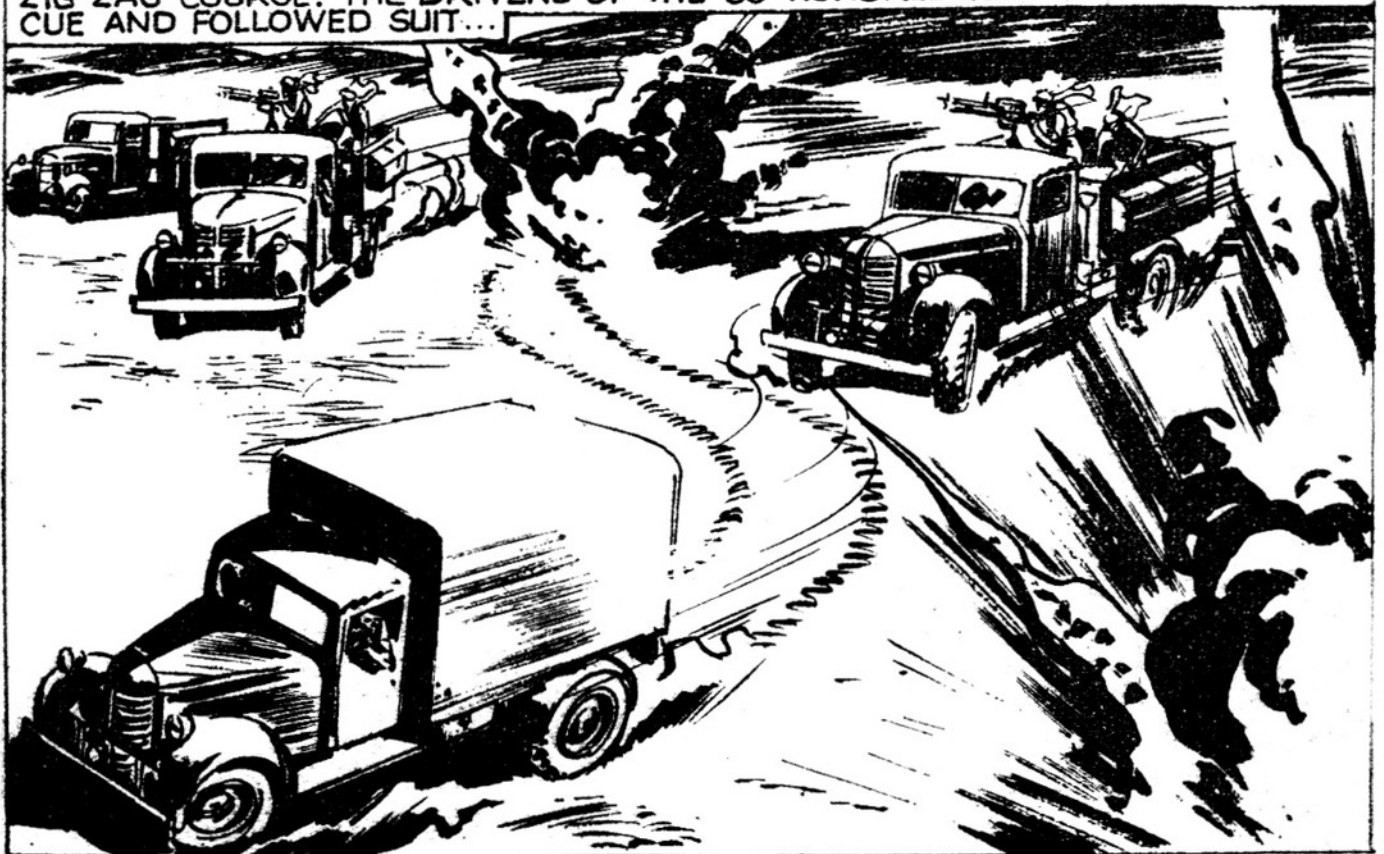




A MOMENT LATER, MIKE SAW THE DOUBLE FLASH OF THE MORTARS' MUZZLE BLASTS. HE RAPPED OUT A COMMAND...



THE LITTLE LANCE JACK SNAKED THE RADIO TRUCK INTO A WIDE-SWEEPING ZIG-ZAG COURSE. THE DRIVERS OF THE 30-HUNDREDWEIGHTS TOOK THEIR CUE AND FOLLOWED SUIT...



THE NAZI MORTARMEN WERE FOXED BY THE QUICKSILVER MANOEUVRES OF THE BRITISH PATROL AND SOON THE TRUCKS WERE TOO CLOSE FOR THE HIGH-ANGLE WEAPONS...



THE 15-HUNDREDWEIGHT'S ACCELERATOR-PEDAL WAS ALREADY CRAMMED DOWN TO FLOOR-LEVEL. MIKE AND RILEY BRACED THEMSELVES FOR THE SHOCK. IT CAME...





BUT THE GATES HELD FIRM AGAINST THE BONE-JOLTING CRASH. FROM IMMEDIATELY ABOVE, RIFLEMEN DIRECTED A VICIOUS FIRE ON THE WIRELESS TRUCK...



THE TRUCK REVERSED AND MIKE STUCK HIS HEAD OUT OF THE CAB AND STARTED HOSING THE PARAPET...



THE WIRELESS TRUCK NEVER DID MAKE A SECOND RUN THOUGH, FOR SERGEANT MEREDITH STORMED PAST IN ONE OF THE HEAVIER VEHICLES.



ITS TWIN LEWIS GUNS SCOURGING THE PARAPET OF THE FORT'S WALL AS IT RACED IN, MEREDITH'S TRUCK SURGED FORWARD.





## Flying Column

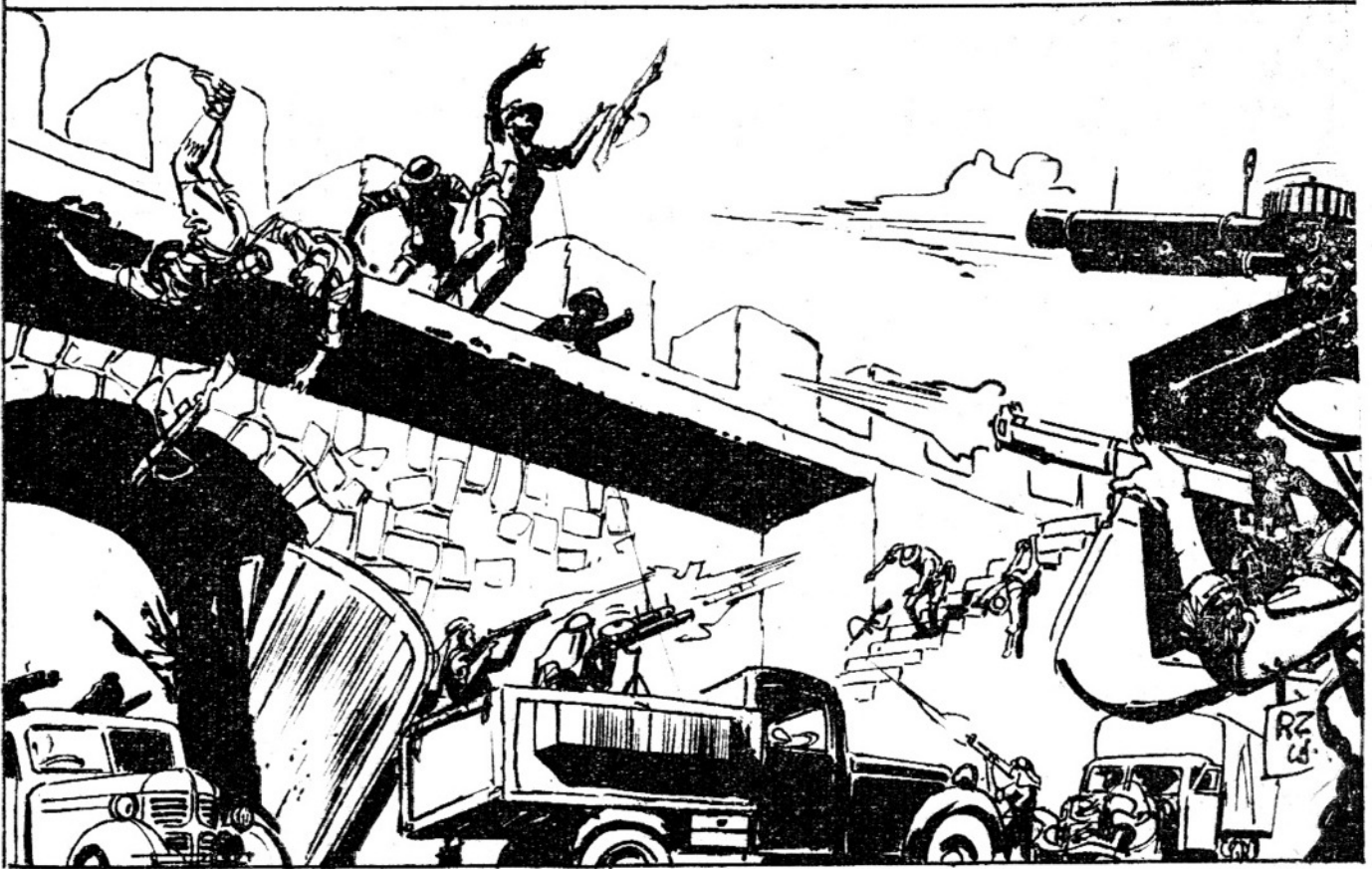
A BULLET CUT SHORT THE NAZI'S EXHORTATION TO HIS MEN...



AT THAT MOMENT THE 30-HUNDREDWEIGHT SMASHED INTO THE GATES, BURSTING THEM ASUNDER.



THE TRUCK RATTLED TO A STANDSTILL INSIDE THE FORT, ALL GUNS BLAZING.



BUT THE TOUGH NAZIS DID NOT GIVE IN EASILY. THEY FOUGHT TO THE BITTER END...





SOON CARRON AND THE OTHER LIBERATED PRISONERS APPEARED AND MIKE HURRIED TO MEET THE SUBALTERN...

GOOD TO SEE YOU, JOHNNIE / MAYBE YOU CAN THROW SOME LIGHT ON WHAT THE JERRIES HAVE BEEN UP TO. WHAT'S BEHIND THIS MASQUERADE OF THEIRS?



PLENTY! THEY'VE BEEN OPERATING IN SURVEY-TEAMS, MAPPING A ROUTE THROUGH THE DEEP DESERT. IT SEEMS A POWERFUL BATTLE-GROUP PLANS TO OUTFLANK AND HIT THE EIGHTH ARMY FROM THE REAR.

DISGUISED AS BRITISH UNITS, THEY'VE MADE GOOD PROGRESS - UNCHALLENGED. IN FACT, THEIR TASK'S NEAR COMPLETION. A BATTLE-GROUP'S ALREADY ON THE MOVE FROM THE TRIGH-EL-ABD AREA...



MIKE'S EARS TWITCHED AT MENTION OF THE TRIGH-EL-ABD. HE EXCHANGED A GLANCE WITH SERGEANT MEREDITH.



I HAD ALL THIS FROM A NAZI LEUTNANT HERE. HE WAS FAIRLY GLOATING OVER THE PROSPECT OF A MASSIVE BRITISH DISASTER. THE BATTLE-GROUP REACHES THE FORT TOMORROW OR THE DAY AFTER...

## Flying Column

WHEN JOHNNIE CARRON HAD TOLD ALL HE KNEW, MIKE TURNED TO MEREDITH...

SERGEANT, YOUR WIRELESS-OPERATOR HAD BETTER CHECK UP ON HIS SET. THE INFORMATION MISTER CARRON'S GIVEN US MUST BE WIRELESSED BACK TO BASE WITH THE MINIMUM OF DELAY.

I UNDERSTAND, SIR.

THE WIRELESS WAS IN BAD SHAPE, BUT THE OPERATOR MANAGED TO REPAIR IT. MIKE TRANSMITTED A FULL REPORT IN PERSON.


DID YOU MANAGE TO CONTACT MAJOR LAWRENCE?

I'LL SAY I DID! YOU SHOULD'VE HEARD HIM WHEN I EXPLAINED I WASN'T ANYWHERE NEAR THE TRIGH-EL-ABD. HE SIMMERED DOWN A BIT AFTER I TOLD HIM ALL YOU'D SAID, JOHNNIE.





THE SUN WAS WELL ABOVE THE HORIZON WHEN MIKE FARRELL LED THE TWO PATROLS AWAY FROM THE ITALIAN FORT...



THERE'S A HAZE GATHERING IN THE NORTH, SIR. MIGHT MAKE IT HARD FOR THE R.A.F. RECCE PLANES TO LOCATE THE JERRY BATTLE-GROUP.

YES - AND *WE* MIGHT RUN SLAP INTO THE JERRIES IF IT PERSISTS LONGER THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. BUT WE'LL KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED!

THE HAZE LASTED THROUGHOUT THE DAY, BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF IT NEXT MORNING. TOWARDS NOON, A HEAVY RUMBLING WAS HEARD...



SOUNDS LIKE GUNFIRE, CAPTAIN FARRELL!

YES - GUNFIRE - AND THE CRUMP OF BOMBS, SERGEANT MEREDITH. MUST BE THE R.A.F. BEATING UP THAT BATTLE-GROUP - BUT NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT!

WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY EATING AT HIM, MIKE GAVE THE ORDERS TO PRESS ON AT THE BEST POSSIBLE SPEED. THE GOING WAS ROUGH, BUT FINALLY...



MIKE CHEWED HIS LIP. WHO WAS MAKING THE KILL?





HE CAME TO A QUICK DECISION...

WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A HAND, LADS! IT'LL BE TIP-AND-RUN-AND IT COULD BE DODGY! BUT IT'S UP TO US TO GIVE OUR FLIERS ALL THE HELP WE CAN.



HAVING OUTLINED A PLAN OF ACTION, HE MADE FOR ONE OF THE TRUCKS...

I'LL TAKE A TURN ON THOSE LEWIS GUNS, TURNER. YOU CAN HAVE A CRACK AT THEM WITH MY TOMMY GUN!

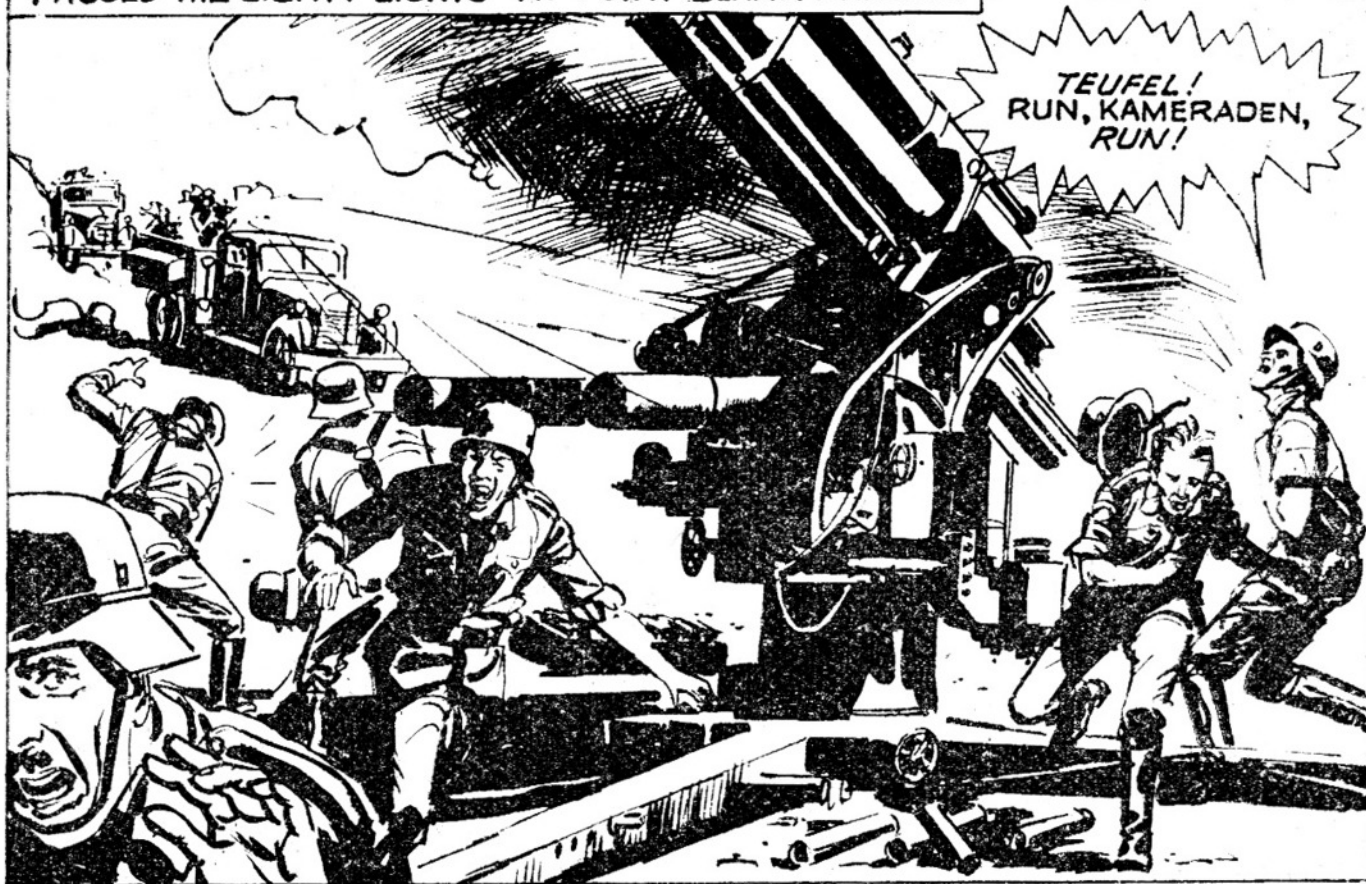


THE FOUR TRUCKS RACED DOWN THE RIDGE, THEIR ARRIVAL UNNOTICED IN THE CONFUSION OF THE AIR-ATTACK...

RIGHT! WE'RE WITHIN HITTING-DISTANCE! HERE GOES!



THE OTHER LEWIS GUNNERS OPENED UP AS THE BRITISH BLAZED A TRAIL PASSED THE EIGHTY-EIGHTS AT POINT BLANK RANGE...



MIKE SQUEEZED OFF A LONG, ACCURATE BURST. PANIC SEIZED THE CREWMEN OF THE ENEMY GUN AS THEY FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE BEATEN ZONE OF A TORRENT OF LEAD.





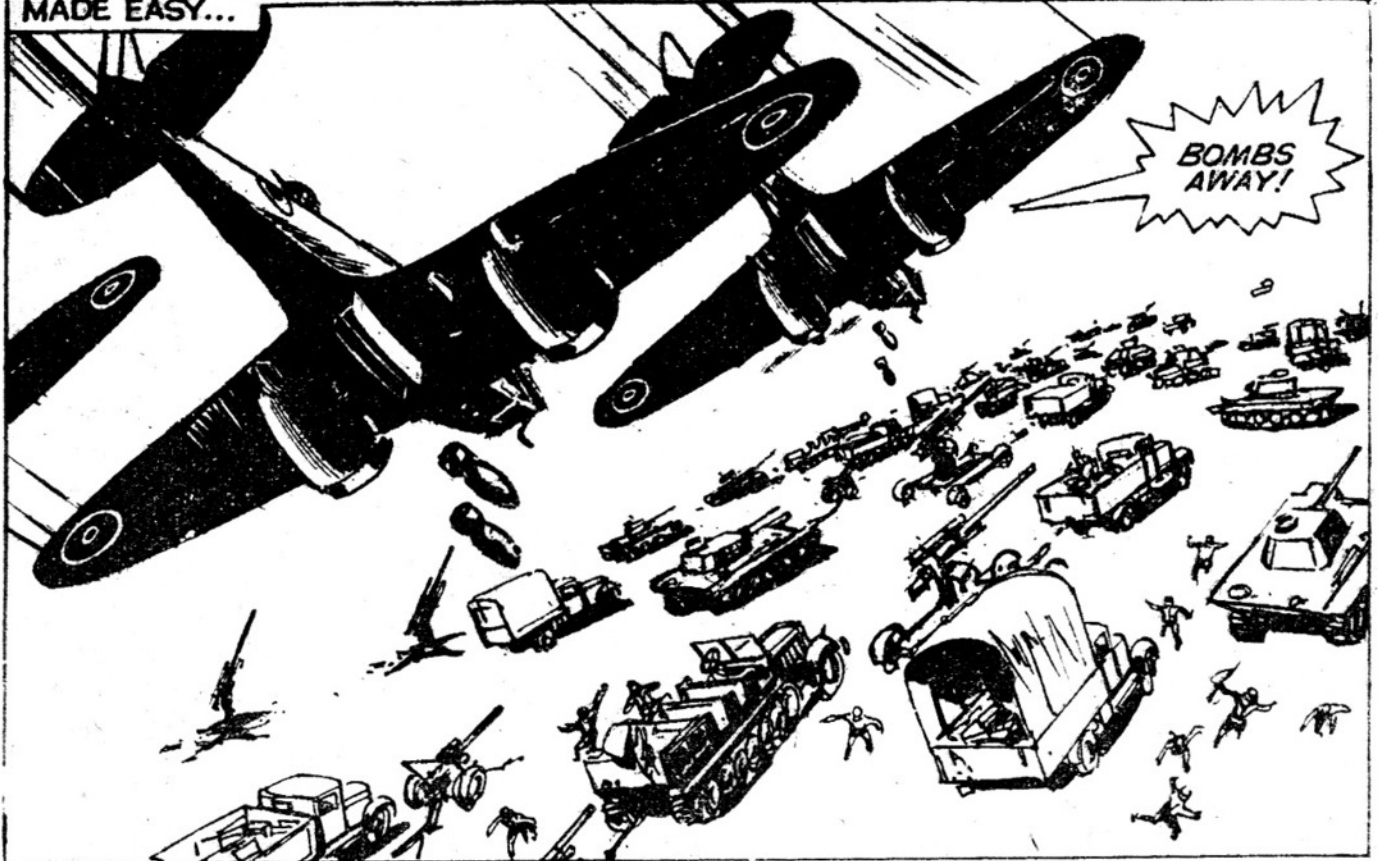
ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE NAZI ARTILLERYMEN TOOK TO THEIR HEELS, A FEW RETALIATED WITH SMALL ARMS...



BUT ONLY ONE GERMAN BULLET HIT A TARGET — THE UNFORTUNATE SERGEANT GRIFFITHS...



MEANTIME, THE BRITISH AIRMEN WERE PROFITING BY THE INTERVENTION OF THE L.R.D.G. THE PILOTS NOSED DOWN, THEIR BOMB-AIMERS' WORK MADE EASY...



THE R.A.F. PLANES HAD BEEN LOADED UP WITH 250-POUNDERS. THEY PLAYED HAVOC WITH THE GERMAN VEHICLES...





THE PANZERS OF THE BATTLE-GROUP WERE NOT BUILT TO STAND UP TO THIS KIND OF PUNISHMENT, EITHER...



THE EIGHTY-EIGHT M.M. GUNS CAME IN FOR ATTENTION, TOO...



THE BOMBERS COMPLETED THEIR STRIKE AND SHEERED OFF ON THE EASTWARD HOME-RUN. BANNERING SMOKE BORE WITNESS TO THE SUCCESS OF THEIR MISSION.



THE L.R.D.G. DRIVERS HEADED SOUTH-EAST, THEN DUE EAST. DAYS AFTERWARDS, THE TRUCKS ROLLED INTO KUFARA...





MIKE LEFT GRIFFITHS IN THE MEDICAL OFFICER'S CARE AND REPORTED TO LAWRENCE. THE MAJOR EYED HIM SEVERELY...



...OR WHETHER I SHOULD KEEP MUM ON THAT SCORE, AND SIMPLY RECOMMEND YOU FOR THE MILITARY CROSS. I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW THAT GERMAN BATTLE-GROUP WAS EVENTUALLY WIPED OUT.



THE MAJOR'S FACE BROKE INTO A SMILE.

NO KIDDING, MIKE, YOU CAN BANK ON AN M.C. AND I DIDN'T HAVE TO RECOMMEND IT. THE BIG-WIGS AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS DECIDED ON IT THEMSELVES.



AS THEY LEFT THE OFFICE SERGEANT MEREDITH WAYLAID THEM...

EXCUSE ME, MAJOR LAWRENCE. MIGHT I HAVE A WORD WITH YOU?



MIKE STROLLED ON ALONE. HE PAUSED AS HE REACHED THE AID POST, AND HE GLANCED INSIDE...

HOW'S SERGEANT GRIFFITHS, DOC?

HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT, BUT IT'LL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE HE SEES ACTIVE SERVICE AGAIN. MAY EVEN GET HIS TICKET FOR CIVVY STREET.



LAWRENCE JOINED MIKE AGAIN. THE CAPTAIN MOTIONED IN THE DIRECTION OF MEREDITH...

THERE'S A CHAP WHO'D HAVE ME COURT-MARTIALLED WITHOUT A DOUBT, IF HE WAS IN YOUR SHOES, SIR.

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK. HE'S JUST ASKED ME FOR A TRANSFER TO YOUR PATROL.





SERGEANT MEREDITH WAS STRIDING OFF ACROSS THE OASIS. THERE WAS AN UNACCUSTOMED SWING IN HIS WALK, A JAUNTINESS IN THE SET OF HIS ARAB HEAD-DRESS.

PERHAPS HE FEELS HE'LL BE A RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON YOU ... OR MAYBE HE'S CAUGHT THE CURSED BUG OF INDIVIDUALISM YOU SEEM TO SPREAD AROUND. EITHER WAY, I'LL LAY ODDS HE WINDS UP BY BEING EVERY BIT AS MUCH A REBEL AS YOU, MIKE FARRELL.



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# 4

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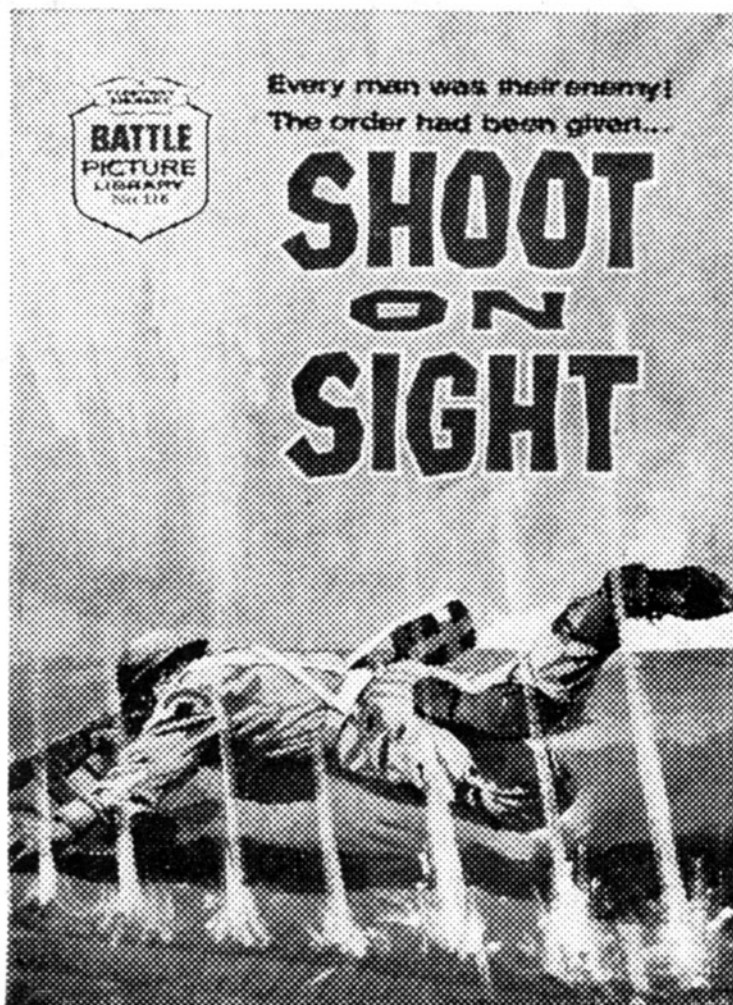
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